

GOSSIP OF THE DRAMA FROM MANY POINTS OF VIEW

Authors and Plays.

Modern Stage Offerings Give Little Evidence of Originality in Their Making.

RETROSPECTIVE contemplation is, as a rule, unprofitable and, for that reason, to be indulged but rarely. Yet it has its uses when it enables us to draw from the past a lesson for the present or the future.

This particular aspect of the proposition nowhere stands out more clearly than in matters relating to the theater. However often the comparison of the stage of our day with that of bygone times has been made, it cannot be held that the matter has been exhausted.

However much has been said about the differences between now and then, the subject is surely too fruitful not to yield material for further reflection and discussion. This thought must furnish the excuse—if there be need for such—for what follows.

It may be pardonable to clothe the premises from which deductions and conclusions are to be drawn in this instance in the form of a question, even though the liberty is taken to append the answer which to us seems proper. In what essentials then, does the stage of our generation most signally differ from that of the past? The answer is—in the lack of originality of conception and treatment. With but few exceptions—extremely few, indeed—the dramatic writers of the present day may be said to choose, each for himself, one especial line of work and proceed along that until he has exhausted all its possibilities and of necessity is compelled to traverse the same ground over and over again.

Wearisome Iteration.

Each of them may achieve a certain kind of excellence in his particular field, but to the discriminating public his efforts and his productions must in the end become monotonous even to the point of weariness. Nor is the force of this circumstance lessened by the fact that a given production of a given playwright—or, for that matter, several of them—may enjoy phenomenal success. It is none the less true that the stage, the theater, the drama—call it what you will—are not permanently benefited or ennobled by the work of his pen.

Far be it from the purpose of the writer to deny the constructive merit of some of the plays with which the American public has been regaled within the past two or three decades. There are not a few which prove the authors to be possessed of great finesse both in the choice of situations and of good taste in the matter of language. It would be pitiful, indeed, if some good grain were not to be found among the chaff.

There are men and women playwrights who are master mechanics at their trade and who build up an edifice so ingeniously that its presentation cannot fail to please the senses of the public, especially that great public that frequents the theater simply "for amusement." It has been asserted more than once that our theatergoing generation does not care to be instructed; it simply wishes to be pleasantly entertained. If this be the correct estimate, why let it go at that, and—"vive la bagatelle!"

Originality at a Discount.

In the briefest possible way it is but necessary to point out the class of plays which of late years have been put on the stage to good effect, the class that their authors lack that originality of conception and treatment which distinguished the works of such men as Sheridan—whose delightful comedy, "School for Scandal," we shall soon have an opportunity to enjoy; Goldsmith, Moliere, Scribe, Bulwer, and dozens of others of that era who might be named. These men did not shun the mental effort of searching for an idea, nor the labor to work it out to its legitimate conclusion. Instead of productions like theirs we are surfeited with dramatizations, adaptations, and other conglomerations of novels—good, bad, and indifferent—most of them despised in the process of transmutation of what literary merit attached to them in their original form. The absolute truth of this assertion must be attested by every one who has, but casually and superficially, observed the dramatic offerings of the present day. Ninety per cent of modern playwrights—and this is liberal allowance—are more than satisfied with themselves if they can succeed in cribbing plot, situations, climaxes—aye, even the very language—of some popular novel and lick these into some sort of shape for presentation on the stage. They lack originality of conception, and their productions ipso facto, lack originality of treatment. Macaulay says somewhere that the character of the drama conforms to the character of its patrons, or words to that effect; but it would be too harsh a judgment on the theater-loving and theater-patronizing public of our day to apply so severe a criticism. If the cold meats of the novelist thus hashed up by the dramatizer and "adapter"—adopter would perhaps be the more correct designation—are accepted without remonstrance by the public, it is because that public is either indifferent to its theatrical merit or too good-natured to enter a protest.

Hope for Better Things.

Fortunately, every cloud has its silver lining, and the cheering gleam can be discerned, we think, in the case under consideration. There has been uttered a protest from more than one quarter against "adapted" drama. Hash is all right once in a while, but served up as a regular diet it is apt to become nauseating. Food of greater consistency is desirable and generally is forthcoming when a determined demand is made for it. Indications are not wanting that the theatrical digestive apparatus of the American public is beginning to rebel against a continuous diet of hash, be the chef that serves it up ever so skillful in his attempts to disguise its real character. The people are beginning to look



Millie James and the Little Princess.

for something original in the way of dramatic pabulum, and that a persistent demand on their part will result in compliance with it is not to be doubted. They have a right to ask that their dramatic purchases shall not consist of second-hand goods; that originality, and not adaptation, shall characterize the offerings of playwrights. In due course of time theatrical managers will take cognizance of this demand, and then our playwrights will be compelled to turn their mental energies into fields not already explored by the novel writers.

There is no occasion to despair of the future of the American stage. Our playwrights are mostly men of talents. Here and there a genius is among them, but he has allowed himself to be beguiled by the easy successes of his comrades-in-arms, and has trod the beaten path. When public sentiment awakens, it will rouse him to forceful action which will carry others along, and then we shall have plays, both serious and gay, that are not cheap revampings of some other person's work.

D. L. S.

Past and Future.

First Season of Symphony Orchestra Comes to Brilliant Close.

The present season of the Washington Symphony Orchestra was brought to a close Tuesday afternoon with one of the best concerts in the career of the organization. Washington has proved that its musical inclinations include offerings of the highest class. This was manifest in the interest displayed in symphony recitals throughout the season and the many expressions of regret that the series of concerts had come to a close. Mr. De Koven, director, and Mr. Droop, manager of the Symphony Orchestra, declare the season has been eminently satisfactory and the prospect is bright.

Tuesday also marked the close of the Choral Society's season, when a fine performance of Haydn's "The Creation" was given at the First Congregational Church. The recital was the last to be given in that edifice, which has served the society for twenty years. The concert will, in future, be given elsewhere.

The theatrical offerings of the past week were productive of much entertainment and some study. Two musical comedies, a light opera, melodrama of high grade, the initial performance of the Berger stock company and burlesque formed the week's bills.

DeWolf Hopper's production of "Mr. Pickwick" drew large audiences to the Columbia Theater. The public was anxious to see just what might be done with the famous "Pickwick Papers" of Dickens and how near to realizing the chief characters De Wolf Hopper could come. Mr. Hopper succeeded in one regard—in creating a character out of himself. Heretofore he has been closely associated with his own personality. His friends have now had the opportunity of noting that his abilities are capable of other and better things. While his characterization differs materially from what the public naturally conceives as the true Dickens character, Mr. Hopper contributes a picturesque and interesting study to the stage of today.

Mabelle Gilman, at the National Theater, entertained a series of fashionable audiences with a presentation of "The Mocking Bird." Miss Gilman, unfortunately, was too ill Monday night to give a performance worthy of her capabilities. Indeed, she was in a serious condition and appeared against the strict orders of her physician. The subsequent performances were highly diverting and Miss Gilman won a new corte of friends.

Chase's operatic season opened with a praiseworthy performance of "The Jolly Musketier," while at the Lafayette the clientele of that theater welcomed back many former stock favorites in "Diplomacy." David Belasco's "The

Heart of Maryland" played to large and enthusiastic audiences at the Academy. The burlesque houses were well patronized throughout the week.

Columbia—Otis Skinner in "Lazarre."

Otis Skinner and his company will be the offering at the Columbia Theater this week, in a dramatization of Mrs. Catherine's novel "Lazarre." "Lazarre" is undoubtedly one of the best romantic stories we have had in years and the play has even outlived the book. American history has furnished of late the material for many interesting dramas, but none has awakened the interest attracted by the stage presentation of "Lazarre" by Otis Skinner. His dramatization was made by Otis Skinner, who assumes the title role, and the clever playwright, Aubrey Boucicault, and has been charmingly contrived, following closely the interest and romance of the novel. It is said to be one of the strongest and deserved triumphs of the current season. Mr. Skinner has always been greatly admired as a romantic actor, and in "Lazarre" he has found the opportunity he has long waited for. The play deals with the personality of Eleazar Williams, one of the most picturesque characters in American history, and is based upon the popular legend, substantiated by the Rev. Mr. Hanson, in 1853, in his article "Have We a Bourbon Among Us," who proved that Williams was, as he claimed to be, Louis XVII, that supposed half-breed Mohawk Indian missionary was in truth the lost Dauphin of France, imprisoned in the Temple during the Revolution. Mr. Skinner's impersonation is said to be ideal; the Indian and French characteristics give the role a picturesque charm, and in his company he is fortunate to include such artists as Nanette Comstock, Maud Durbin, Charles B. Welles, Walter Allen, Joseph Weaver, Walter Lewis, Ben. F. Ringgold and others.

D. L. S.

National—"The Little Princess."

"The Little Princess" and her retinue come to the National Theater this week—matinees Wednesday and Saturday. Charles B. Dillingham's production of Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett's new play, "The Little Princess," is one of the dramatic novelties and one of the greatest successes of the season. The play was produced simultaneously in London at the Shaftesbury Theater and in New York at the Criterion Theater. Its first performance in New York stamped its success. The critics hailed it as the most artistic production of the season, and the public was as quick to see its merits. It has been playing to crowded houses for several months.

Not a little of the sensation made by the play has been due to the appearance in the principal part of Millie James, a young actress who had not before gained more prominence than was attached to the excellent work she did in a small part in "Lovers' Lane." Miss James is in her twenties, but plays the part of a little girl of twelve, and does not fail in the slightest particular to make the illusion convincing.

The other members of Mr. Dillingham's large company are well qualified and well known. They include Mabel Taliaferro, Louise Galloway, Frederick Murphy, Thomas Coleman, Gordon Tomkins, Eugene Woodward, May Daventport, Seymour Leonie Darnon, and Tully Marshall.

Chase—"The Wizard of the Nile."

"The Wizard of the Nile," the picturesque and melodious work of Victor Herbert, in which Frank Daniels fashioned his most grotesquely comic role of Kibosh, will be the second offering of the comic and grand opera season at Chase's, the week commencing with the matinee tomorrow afternoon. The production admits of a much more elaborate and popular presentation than was possible with "The Jolly Musketier," and Mr. Chase promises this week's work will surpass even the very complete performance of the same opera last season, and, indeed,

in many respects will not be inferior to the original interpretation. It will have the advantage of all the fine scenery and Egyptian costumes that made the Daniels production one of the most attractive presentations in many seasons, and, besides, the special cast of principals contains several who created their roles in the same company with the little comedian.

Foremost among these is Agnes Paul, who was the first Abydos and who looks and acts the handsome apprentice to perfection. Another is the basso, William Schuster, who was the original Cheops, the royal weather bureau. Frederick Knight who is to be Ptarmigan, the manly wooer of the languorous Cleopatra, will find himself in the part which he played with Mr. Daniels. Cleopatra will be beautifully embodied and sung by Lillian, Christine Hudson, Simona, the youthful wife of "King Ptolemy," will be presented by Bernice Holmes, who has made a great hit in the part. Her royal spouse will fall to the lot of Herman Hirschberg, one of the cleverest of comic opera character comedians.

Kibosh, the wizard, will be confided to Mr. Henderson, who starred in the part all last season and who should give a very laughable and satisfactory performance of the funny phases of the necromancer's adventures. The "thirty show girls" of the chorus will be attractively arrayed as the Egyptian maidens. The matinees will be only on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday.

Academy—"The Sign of the Cross."

"The Sign of the Cross," Wilson Barrett's historical drama, which has been the success of two continents during the last seven years, comes to this city for



Lily Lorrell in "The Sign of the Cross."

the first time at popular prices this week at the Academy. Since its first appearance in America, when it was presented by William Greet's London company at the Knickerbocker Theater, in New York the play has been seen in only the highest priced theaters of our largest cities, and so great has been its success that year after year the entire season was filled

with return visits to these same cities. This season, however, the American rights have been acquired by Fred G. Berger, locally known here for his connection with the "Berger Stock Company," and who is presenting this remarkable drama in the popular priced houses. Mr. Berger has purchased from Mr. Greet, manager of the Lyric theater, and other prominent London playhouses, all of the scenery, costumes, and appointments. During the past summer every set of scenery has been repainted by Homer Emmons, the eminent New York scenic artist; the costumes have been renovated or have been replaced by new ones; and most of the prominent English actors appearing in the cast last season have been engaged for the present tour.

Lafayette—"Trilby," by Berger Stock Company.

A great play from a deeply interesting and likewise pleasing book is the offering of the Berger Stock Company at the Lafayette Square Opera House for the coming week. "Trilby," the book, was a widely read novel, and was universally acclaimed the most notable work from the pen of George DuMaurier, the author; "Trilby," the play, was an adaptation from the novel by Paul M. Potter, and in the operation he fairly outdid himself, injecting bits of stagecraft that to this day are considered masterpieces in technique, though since the first production of this "book play" dramatists have made an ardent endeavor to discount "Trilby" in the matter of unique and startling effects. Potter's ingenuity in the arrangement of the famous theater scene, where Trilby breaks down is considered a notable achievement.

The cast for the Berger production is as follows: Svengali, John T. Sullivan; Little Billie, Frederic Sullivan; Taffy, Charles Wyngate; The Laird, W. H. Tooker; Gecko, George C. Pearce; Zou Zou, John Daly Murphy; Dodor, Don C. Orr; Lorimer, Joseph Kauffmann; Rev. Thomas Bagot, Myron Leffingwell; Colonel Kaw, Joseph O'Connor; Selene Johnson, Mme. Vinard; Gertrude Berkeley, Mrs. Bagot; Jane Rivers, and the two grissettes, Susanne Parker and Susette Jackson. A splendid production is planned, including original scenic effects and interpretation.

Empire—Black Stock Company.

The Avery and Hart stock company will offer for the second week of its engagement at the Empire Theater the same musical comedy that held the boards last week. It will, however, be given with all new musical numbers and specialties, so that practically everything will be fresh except the dialogue, which is good enough to be repeated. It is apparent that the experiment of installing a colored stock company at the Empire has filled a popular demand, for the play house has been crowded at every performance.

Lycium—Watson's Americans.

Watson's Americans, who are to appear at Kernan's Theater this week, is one of the largest and best organizations traveling this season, from all reports of where they have previously appeared. The company is headed by the charming Jeanette Dupre, the popular comedienne, and W. B. Watson, the great "Selbini" trick bicyclist, the Ved-nars, an importation from England; the dainty Ella Shields, who sings her way into the hearts of her hearers; West and Williams, black face artists; the Bachelor Sisters, Hayman and Hayman, Raymond and Burke, and others.

Bertha Galland and Company

An Organization of Singular Strength and Unity.

The Bertha Galland Company will hold the boards at the Columbia Theater for four weeks commencing Monday evening, May 11. As announced, the opening bill will be Richard Brinsley Sheridan's famous comedy, "The School for Scandal." The first appearance of the Galland Company is to be an event of much importance and one which from point of interest and excellence of artists engaged has rarely been equaled in a spring engagement by any local manager. Several parties will come down from New York especially for this occasion, and among them are numbers persons of wealth and social position in the metropolis. Indeed, the coming attraction at the Columbia is creating as much talk in New York as it is here.

The members of the Galland Company are all actors and actresses of note. The smallest parts are to be played by professionals of reputation. Miss Galland is young woman of rare judgment regarding the selection of her support. She insists upon being surrounded by artists, and believes that one of the greatest essentials to an enjoyable performance is a well-balanced organization.

Miss Galland has achieved success very early in her career. She is twenty-three years of age, and has been on the stage only four seasons. She made her start at the head of her own company in a starring tour in a repertoire of scenes from classic plays. It was customary for her to appear as Juliet, Lady Macbeth, Lady Teazle, and Ophelia in one evening. She made everywhere an excellent impression, and was heralded as the successor to Mary Anderson. Her artistic reputation in this short venture reached the ears of New York managers and she was engaged as leading woman for James K. Hackett in "The Pride of Jennico." The papers the morning following her first appearance were full of extravagant admiration of the charming young actress. Shortly after she signed with Daniel Frohman to star the next year. She made her New York appearance as a star at the head of a company of excellent players under Mr. Frohman's management as Isoult in "The Forest Lovers," and has been accredited with creating one of the most beautiful characters of recent years. During the present season, Miss Galland starred under Daniel Frohman



Selene Johnson at the Lafayette.

in "Notre Dame," a version of Victor Hugo's great novel. She again scored an artistic hit.

Those who saw her performance of the quarrel scene from "School for Scandal" at the actors' benefit given two weeks ago by Daniel Frohman in Philadelphia predict she will create a sensation in the famous old role. Miss Galland has studied the methods of all the celebrated actresses as Lady Teazle, and, profiting by these, she has endeavored to offer her own interpretation of the part, and is said to act it in a manner different from all her predecessors.

John Blair, the leading man for the Galland company, is considered one of the finest actors on the stage. Mr. Blair, like Miss Galland, is young and possesses a fine artistic sense. Mr. Blair has been on the stage but a few seasons. He has done excellent work as leading man for Janussek, Julia Marlowe, and during the present season for Mrs. Patrick Campbell. He is chiefly known in this city through his excellent performance in a series of monthly matinees in Ibsen plays.

Frank Roberts, who was here as the Cardinal with Percy Haswell in "A Royal Family," will be Sir Peter Teazle in "School for Scandal." Robert V. Ferguson, the well-known comedian and character actor; Geoffrey Stein, a prominent member of Henrietta Crosman's forces last season; William Kittridge, a popular American leading man in England, and Marshall Farum, leading man this season for Lavinia Shannon, are a few well-known names in the Galland company. W. H. Post, who has staged some excellent productions and is a fine actor as well, will be seen during this engagement, as will Edgar MacGregor, a member of Daniel Frohman's forces. Robert Hickman, stage manager, and Arthur Buchanan, assistant, will complete the list of the men.

Mrs. Kate Denin Wilson, who has been a member of some of the most prominent casts, is to be leading old woman for Miss Galland, and Miss Margaret Bourne, last seen here in "The Forest Lovers," will also be in the company.

Selene Johnson's Success.

Due to Native Dramatic Ability Joined to a Charming Personality.

The cordial reception extended Selene Johnson, the leading woman of the Berger stock company, at the Lafayette Square Opera House last week, must have been very gratifying to her. As Dora in "Diplomacy" she manifested strong emotional elements, especially in the scene where she is accused of betraying her husband's secrets. However, the piece offered small scope for the display of really great dramatic ability. Miss Johnson's stage career has been

such as to fit her particularly well for her work. Aside from participating in amateur theatricals at home, Miss Johnson received her first training as a student at the American Academy of Dramatic Art, in New York, under the direction of Franklin Sargent. Graduating from there she obtained a wide experience in the famous old role. Miss Galland has studied the methods of all the celebrated actresses as Lady Teazle, and, profiting by these, she has endeavored to offer her own interpretation of the part, and is said to act it in a manner different from all her predecessors.

"Divinely tall" and with a nose and face whose contour has often been likened to that of Mary Anderson, Miss Johnson possesses an admirable personality. Her taste runs principally to reading, while, in common with her sex, she gives no little thought to the designing and making of her gowns. In this respect she is very particular, as an instance of last week will demonstrate.

The Friday previous to the opening of "Diplomacy," Miss Johnson failed to find in her extensive wardrobe a particular dress she desired for the second act of the play—a light gray, one suggesting a bride. There were gray ones in the lot, to be sure, but none of them exactly suited Miss Johnson's esthetic taste. Nothing daunted, however, she straightaway made for the rooms of a leading fashionable modiste in this city, gave the order, had the linings cut and fitted, and left the rest to the dressmaker. Miss Johnson did not see the garment afterward until it was deposited at her dressing room door the night of the opening, just before the curtain rose on the first act. And it fit, too.

In the Twinkling of an Eye.

Remarkable Transformation Scene in "The Little Princess."

The transformation scene in the second act of "The Little Princess," which comes to the National Theater tomorrow night, is so complete and sweeping that it deserves a special note as a triumph of stage management. To alter completely the appearance of the stage in a little over two minutes, and that without removing any of the scenery, is certainly an innovation. Of course, there have been other dark changes where everything on the stage was replaced by another set, but this transformation scene is entirely different from anything ever before attempted. And what is more interesting and to the point, it takes place in full view of the audience.

The plot demands that as Millie James, the household drudge, sleeps in her bare little garret, the good Lascars sent by the kind old gentleman shall climb into the attic window and transform